

Allergens: Latex

What is a latex allergy?

Some adults have an allergy or sensitivity to latex (rubber). Reactions can be seen when products made from latex come in contact with the person's skin, mucous membranes (like the mouth, genitals, bladder or rectum), or the bloodstream (during surgery). Some people may react when blowing up a rubber balloon or breathing in powder from the inside of latex gloves.

What are the symptoms of a latex allergy?

When the person has contact with products that contain latex you may see watery or itchy eyes, wheezing, hives, flushing or a skin rash, itching, or swelling. In some cases, severe reactions ("anaphylactic shock") can occur in which the person may have problems breathing, experience chest tightness, or have swelling of his/her throat or tongue. Severe reactions require prompt emergency treatment.

Who is at risk for developing latex allergy?

Some people who have frequent exposure to latex from medical procedures. Please note: Avoiding latex products may decrease the chance of developing this allergy.

People who have allergies to certain foods may also have a latex allergy. Both the foods and the latex may have some of the same proteins. Commonly eaten foods which contain some of the same proteins as latex include: bananas, avocados, chestnuts, kiwi, passion fruit, papaya, figs, peaches, nectarines, plums, tomatoes, and celery.

What to avoid if allergic to latex?

Many items at home and in the hospital are made from latex. These include:

Home and Community		Hospital	
Balloons (including mylar)	Handles on Racquets, Tools	Surgical and Exam Gloves	Ambu Tube
Koosh, Rubber balls	Kitchen Cleaning Gloves	IV Tubing Injection Sites	Cuffs on Non-Latex
Pacifiers, Bottle Nipples	Newsprint, Coupons Dusted	Catheters	Tracheal Tubes
Condoms, Diaphragms	with Latex	Adhesive tape	Dental Dams
Beach toys	Toys – ex. Stretch	Electrode Pads	Elastic Bandages
Art Supplies	Armstrong, Old Barbies,	Blood Pressure Cuffs	Endotracheal Tubes
Rubber bands	Bowling Balls	Tourniquets	Enema Tubing
Band-Aids	Zippered Plastic Storage	Stethoscopes	Gurney Mattress
Wheelchair Cushion, Tires	Bags	Adhesive Bandages	Hemodialysis Equipment
Latex Paint	Crutches, Axillary Pads,	Patient Controlled Analgesia	Housekeeping Gloves
Raincoats	Hand Grips	Syringes	Medication Vial Stoppers
Disposable Diapers	Dental Braces with Rubber	Protective Sheets	Oral & Nasopharyngeal
Chux®	Bands	Stomach and Intestinal	Airways
Carpet Backing	Clothes, Socks, Underwear	Tubes (g-tubes)	Suction Catheters
Rubber Gym Floors	Elastic	Wound Drains	Ventilator Hoses, Bellows
	... and many more items	Warming Blankets	... and many more items

* Any item that is light brown in color and can be stretched may contain latex. There are items that can be used in place of the items that contain latex. They are made from vinyl, plastic, or silicone.

If you are allergic to latex:

- * Avoid **ALL** latex products at home and at work. Use only items that do not have latex in them.
- * Ask your physician to evaluate you for pre-medication before surgery to help prevent a reaction.
- * **Use a Medic-Alert bracelet or necklace.**
- * Carry a pair of non-latex gloves with you, information about latex allergies, and/or a note from your physician.
- * Be sure hospital has record of your latex allergy.
- * **Contact your physician about the use of injectable epinephrine.** You are responsible and required to have it available for yourself in all surroundings (at home, in the car, or at work).
- * Know what to do in case of an emergency. Discuss this with your physician.
- * Avoid areas where you may inhale latex molecules from healthcare workers.

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Adapted from www.MUSChealth.com/allergy/latex.hmt;

Please refer to site or contact MUSC Employee Health Services @ 792-2991 for additional resources & information.

**MUSC Medical Center
Clinical Policy Manual
Policy C-52**

Subject: LATEX ALLERGY

Purpose: To provide guidelines for making the MUSC Medical Center a latex-safe environment for patients and staff, including the prevention of unnecessary latex sensitization and exposure. This policy also serves as a guideline for the identification of latex allergy and the protocol for dealing with patients and staff with latex allergies.

Policy:

A. Statement

Latex allergy can affect both patients and health care workers, and strict measures must be enacted to guarantee the safety of anyone potentially exposed to latex products. Primary prevention of sensitization, as well as prevention of exposure, either directly or indirectly, to latex by those known to be sensitive are critical.

B. Identification of Latex Allergy

1. A person will be considered latex allergic if he/she has a history of allergic symptoms associated with exposure to latex products. These **allergic symptoms can include:**

- * **contact urticaria or dermatitis (rash)**
- * **urticaria (hives)**
- * **angioedema (swelling of eyes, hands, mouth, etc...)**
- * **rhinitis (runny nose, sneezing)**
- * **conjunctivitis or watery eyes**
- * **wheezing/bronchospasm/asthma**
- * **anaphylaxis**

Latex allergy should also be presumed and the patient appropriately protected from latex exposure when there is:

- * history of unexplained anaphylaxis during or surrounding surgery or other medical procedure in which there may have been latex exposure, whether or not it was identified.
- * history of spina bifida or other neural tube defects

Consultation with an allergist or physician familiar with latex allergies should be sought to confirm the diagnosis of latex allergy. Latex allergy can develop at any time, and negative testing at one time period does not rule out the possibility of development of allergy at a later date.

2. High Risk

Individuals who are at high risk of developing latex allergy and in whom a high index of suspicion must be maintained include:

- * all health care workers exposed to latex, especially those with atopy
- * individuals with atopy (i.e., allergies, asthma, hay fever, food allergies)
- * individuals with occupational exposure to latex rubber
- * individuals with history of congenital genitourinary abnormalities or others requiring frequent bladder catheterizations
- * individuals who have undergone multiple surgical procedures

3. Patient Screening

a. Latex allergy will be addressed in both inpatients and outpatients. Patients will be screened by physicians during initial evaluation and in the nursing admission assessment.

b. High-risk patients will be screened at every hospital and/or outpatient encounter regarding new symptoms or reactions (see "high risk" above).

c. Positive findings must be documented in the patient's chart and communicated to any participating physicians or patient care departments. This includes, but is not limited to, the operating room, radiology, pharmacy, occupational or physical therapy.

C. Use of Latex Products:

1. For the many medical devices which contain latex (see appendix A), a latex-free product should be substituted when there is an appropriate, equivalent product available and when cost is not prohibitive. When substitution would result in a significant cost disadvantage, the clinical necessity of its replacement should be reviewed. Product Evaluation will actively review products for their latex content and recommend appropriate substitutions. **The MUSC Latex Allergy Home Page, <http://www.musc.edu/medcenter/policyNov2001/Med/www.musc.edu/latexallergy>** is kept current with this information by Product Evaluation.

2. Since latex gloves, both nonsterile examination and sterile surgical gloves, represent the greatest single source of exposure to latex, the following guidelines should be applied:

- * immediate replacement of all latex examination gloves with latex-free products in all clinical settings; use of surgical gloves should be considered in areas where contamination is likely
- * immediate replacement of latex gloves by non-latex equivalent in other areas of hospital accessible to patients and employees (e.g., cafeteria, environmental services, etc.)
- * replacement of present sterile, surgical gloves by non-powdered, low-allergen, sterile latex gloves. These should be standard surgical gloves worn by health care workers not known to be latex-allergic when working with patients not known to be latex allergic

* non-latex, sterile surgical gloves, must be provided and be readily available in all clinical settings for use by employees known to be latex allergic, or for use with latex-allergic patients

* No powder-containing latex gloves are to be used anywhere in the hospital. Appropriate products which meet these specifications will be coordinated through Product Evaluation

3. A latex-free cart (containing latex-free medical products such as catheters, IV access supplies, ET tubes, and tapes) must be available in all patient care areas (including the Main Operating Room) to provide rapid access to latex-free products.

4. Areas and services to be maintained as latex-safe environments include the emergency room, radiology suite, operating suites, venipuncture and lab services, cafeteria, and house keeping services.

5. The Rutledge Tower facility will be maintained as a latex-safe environment; no powdered latex products will be allowed at any time.

6. Latex balloons are prohibited in the entire hospital facility.

D. Purchase of Latex Products:

The purchase of all latex products for use in any clinical area of the Medical Center (including ambulatory clinic settings) should be coordinated through Product Evaluation Committee.

E. Occupational Latex Allergy Guidelines

1. It is required for all new employees to be questioned about history of latex allergy, risk factors, and latex exposures.

Diagnostic testing should be done as deemed appropriated by the evaluating physician or health care provider.

2. **Education** regarding latex allergies should be provided to all employees regarding signs and symptoms of latex allergy and strategies for minimizing risk of sensitization.

3. Employees suspected of being latex allergic must be evaluated through ~~Carolina Centers for Occupational Health~~(EHS) ~~Carolina Centers for Occupational Health~~ (EHS) will use standard protocol for evaluation as mutually established with physicians from the Department of Dermatology and Division of Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine, Allergy and Clinical Immunology. Referral for evaluation and management will be at the recommendation of the examining health care provider.

4. **Employees diagnosed with latex allergy** will be instructed about their allergy and appropriate recommendations will be made to ensure their immediate and long-term safety. Active participation by members of the Occupational Safety and Health Division will help determine latex exposure at the worksite and provide recommendations regarding **appropriate accommodations for the employee**, and the employee will **continue to work as their condition allows**.

F. Education for Latex Allergic Patients and Staff

Education of latex-allergic individuals regarding their allergy is an essential component of their management. Education of patients, both inpatient and outpatient, is the responsibility of the appropriate nursing staff or primary clinician. Education of employees will be coordinated through ~~Carolina Centers for Occupational Health~~(EHS)

1. **Individuals identified as being latex allergic must be counseled to:**

* **absolutely avoid any latex exposure**

* **obtain and wear a medic alert identifier specifying latex allergy**

* **carry autoinjection epinephrine for self-treatment of anaphylaxis**

* **carry a supply of non-latex gloves for medical/dental exams**

2. A regularly updated list of latex-containing products (both medical and household) should be provided to latex-allergic patients and staff. **Staff and latex allergic individuals should be instructed to maintain a high degree of awareness and check for latex content in suspect items.**

3. **Educational information** describing the signs and symptoms of latex allergy will be provided to latex-allergic patients and staff. Additional resources should be offered (e.g., information regarding Internet sites, etc.). **A MUSC Latex Allergy Education Home Page: <http://www.musc.edu/~daffinsi/latexeducation/page1.htm>**

G. Education and Management of Students

1. Education regarding latex allergies should be incorporated into student education (preferably during orientation in each specific college).

2. Students suspected of being latex-allergic will be evaluated and referred as indicated through Student Health Services.

Procedure:

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{3/16/04 EHS reformatted font; & changed ~~Carolina Centers for Occupational Health~~ to (EHS) MUSC Employee Health Services}

APPENDIX A LATEX AVOIDANCE PROTOCOL

- Use non latex exam and surgical gloves
- Use hypo-allergenic hand and antiseptic soaps
- Minimize amount of time in gloves and wash hands immediately after glove removal
- Use non-lipid cleansers and hand lotions
- Issue: list of latex containing products found at work and home to be avoided

